

Your friendly neighborhood ticket lady

"Within the first six months I had to give my sister a ticket. But two hours is two hours whether you're family or not."

By Sean McGinty
Post-Record staff

Here she comes. She's half a block away, rolling down the street in her three-wheeled coupe. She's brandishing her chalk-on-a-stick; she's getting closer. She's here.

The Meter Maid. Ticket Lady.

Tami Strunk's official title is parking enforcement officer. The Camas resident has been branded a multitude of colorful monikers over the years, some of which aren't suitable for print—all she really wants to be known by is Tami.

"She's marking tires!"

Keys jingle and Post-Record employees scramble for the door. They rush to their cars, rev the engines, drive around the block, park two spaces down from their original spot and return to work.

Two hours later: She's checking cars!

Again, everyone springs into action: dash to vehicle, rev engine, move car two spaces.

Repeat ad infinitum.

Tami says Post-Record employees aren't alone

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Parking enforcement officer

marked them—I see that all the time."

Humans seem to have an appetite for this hopeless, repetitive toil. We are Sisyphus, condemned each day to pushing the boulder up the hill, only to have it roll back down each time we reach the top. And yet, there is a certain joy in the incessant game.

"I'm sure lots of businesses have ways of keeping track of me," Tami says. "They've got their man posted at the window—here she comes!" One business even sets a timer when they see her coming, to mark off the two hours before she returns to issue tickets.

Still, the relationship between Tami and the downtown businesses isn't necessarily antagonistic.

Far more people wave to her than curse her under their breath. The reason is simple. With her calm demeanor and perpetual smile, Tami Strunk may be one of the nicest parking enforcement officers in the Pacific Northwest, if not the



HOMETOWN PHOTO BY SEAN MCGINTY

Tami says that while she does issue an average of 15 tickets a week, the money isn't a serious source of revenue for the Camas Police Department. A significant percentage of each ticket is split among state agencies or used to pay processing fees.

United States proper.

Tami, who spends her off hours working part time at the Zion Lutheran Church and shuttling her 12-year-old son to social and sporting events, has been a parking enforcement officer for nearly four years.

"I saw the ad and it looked like a fun job to do and I thought, 'well, I'll go down and apply for it' and that's how it started," says Tami.

Of course, it wasn't that easy. She had to take a civil service test, go through interviews and compete with about 30 other applicants for her job. As a parking enforcement officer, Tami's duties are fairly straightforward. She has no quota of tickets to fill, but says that in a typical week she will issue maybe 15.

Her main purpose, she says, is to keep traffic in downtown moving. She is equipped with a piece of chalk on a stick (her "chalk stick") for marking tires, and for transportation has a three-wheeled car (her "buggy"). "It's not bad. It's got a heater in it so it keeps me warm in the winter and I open the doors for air conditioning in the summer." Tami also serves as a resource for downtown visitors, and is often asked for directions to the Pendleton Woolen Mill, to a nearby campsite, or simply to suggest a good place to eat.

"It is a fun job," says Tami. "You get to know the businesses. It's nice to see all the people downtown and have the rapport with them. I know some people don't like to see me coming, but for the most part I don't think they mind."

Tami can only recall a few sticky situations from all her years at work. The first involved a relative.

"Within the first six months [of being on the job] I had to give my sister a ticket," she says. "[But] two hours is two hours whether you're family or not."

And once—the only time she can remember—a man wouldn't

take a ticket from her, but she handled the situation with aplomb.

"He wouldn't roll down his window," she recalls. "I said, 'I can mail it to you or have an officer give it to you,' and he finally rolled down his window and said, 'just give me it.'"

"You know," she adds. "I think a lot of times people are more upset with themselves for getting the ticket than they are with me."

This is true.

Until she recently began to rent a space, Brenda Emmons, circulation manager at the Post-Record, was racking up tickets, but she doesn't hold any grudge against Tami. "I think [Tami] is a wonderful person," says Emmons. "Very friendly, always has a smile on her face."

"I think she does a wonderful job," agrees Cathy Gonzalez, owner of Sweet Surrender, the downtown candy and ice cream shop. "She keeps the cars moving down here."

Gonzalez also rents a parking spot so she doesn't have to hassle with tickets, but admits that she still informs her neighbor when she sees Tami coming.

And though we may set up watch, sprint to our cars, and do our every darnedest to escape a ticket, tickets still get issued.

"There's other ways we have of knowing if the cars have been there or not been there," says



The accouterments of Tami's job include her three-wheeled buggy and the "chalk stick," with which she marks the tires of parked cars.

Tami. "It's not always necessarily the chalk."

She has ways of knowing, but won't reveal her tricks to the newspaper. Probably for the best—what would people do with their time if not dodging tickets?

And what would Tami do if everyone knew her tricks?

The relationship between Tami and Camas citizens is, in the end, a good one.

Recently attending a parking enforcement conference in San Francisco, Calif. Tami heard all kinds of horror stories relating to parking enforcement officers; they had stories of being harassed, yelled at, spit on.

"I'm glad I work in Camas," says Tami. "Camas is just a great place. I like my job. I enjoy coming to work every day."



The price for exceeding the parking time limit in downtown Camas is \$15. But get caught in a handicapped spot, and you'll be down 250 big ones.

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